

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 346 519

CS 507 836

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TITLE The Work Study Student as Collaborator: The Thrill of Victory, the Agony of Defeat.
PUB DATE 2 Nov 91
NOTE 10p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association (77th, Atlanta, GA, October 31-November 3, 1991).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *College Students; Cooperation; *Employer Employee Relationship; Employment Practices; Higher Education; Research Administration; Speech Communication; *Student Employment; *Work Study Programs
IDENTIFIERS Collaborative Research

ABSTRACT

A professor at a small college collaborated with work study students on four individual research projects and also received their assistance in managing the annual conference of the Communication Association of Massachusetts. Based on these experiences, the professor has identified several exigencies and benefits of collaborating with work study students. The exigencies are that: (1) the students make only the minimum wage and may have another job off-campus to earn spending money; (2) hours worked need to be flexible; (3) not much work can be expected from the students before, during, or after examination periods; (4) some students may be unwilling to perform certain functions--for example, a student may be uncomfortable on the telephone; (5) students need to be trained and managed; (6) the more specific the deadline, the more the students need to be managed; (7) it is important to make sure that the faculty member has free access to supervise the students; and (8) faculty members should not expect specific skills from the students before the first meeting. Among the many benefits of using work study students as collaborators are: students can offer a perspective on the research that no faculty peer can; the work study student will probably be a willing co-creator of the research project; students are provided with an applied understanding of course work; having female work study students allows female faculty members to mentor a woman in their own field; and using work study students as research collaborators can make routine work fun. Work study student collaborator research offers both challenges and pitfalls. (RS)

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*"The Work Study Student as Collaborator:
The Thrill of Victory,
The Agony of Defeat"*

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A Paper Presented at the
77th Annual Meeting
of the
Speech Communication Association
Atlanta, Georgia
November 2, 1991

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The purpose of this panel is to stimulate research at small colleges (or large universities) by providing insight into potential methods and pitfalls of researching in collaboration with students. This paper specifically addresses the "Thrill of Victory" and "Agony of Defeat" of having work study students function as research collaborators. As of this writing, I have had work study students support me in four individual research projects as well as in an annual special event at the college to raise money for UNICEF. They also help me to manage the annual conference of the Communication Association of Massachusetts of which I have been President for the past two years.

It would be easier to describe each project than to synthesize the learnings of collaborating with the students. Each project always presents its own learning experiences and challenges to the researcher. When the ingredient of student collaborators - specifically work study students - is added to the formula - an incredible recipe can emerge.

There are certain exigencies one must respect when working with work study students as collaborators. It is important that these exigencies are taken into consideration and respected. Otherwise your student collaborators are no longer partners, but the opposite team in a tug-of-war.

"The Agony of Defeat" (Exigencies)

- Remember that your work study student is making minimum wage. Some work study grants go directly to pay

tuition. If your work study student has another job off campus to have spending money, (you may have to be flexible with the hours worked.

•Your work study student is working off a grant.

Remember both that there is a limitation to the number of hours that can be worked each week and that the student needs to work a certain minimum number of hours in order to pay tuition or have spending cash. Plan the work load so that the student isn't overwhelmed during midterms and finals (see below) and make contingency plans for additional work for the student if your weekly research load does not meet his/her needed hours.

•Do not expect any work study students who are good students to do much work the week before, during and after midterms or the week before and during finals. The question arises as to how you can discover the work study students who are also good students (if they're not in your classes). This is simple, the majority of the good students who receive a work study grant will show up to find you and begin their hours within one week of the beginning of the semester (unless your financial aid office is malfunctioning.)

•Respect your student's unwillingness to perform certain functions. In order to do this, you must - of course - be willing to do any steps you request of the students. I had an excellent Communication major as a work study student on a math-intensive, detailed research project refuse to participate in making the initial informative calls for a survey - which were to all 100 degree granting institutions in the Commonwealth of

Massachusetts to discover the names of the Vice Presidents or Deans of Academic Affairs and to double check addresses. Stephen simply did not feel comfortable on the phone. Rather than make him wrong, I did the calls. However, as we received the survey responses, he input all the data into the computer. Not only did he input all the data, but he also took it upon himself to insure validity in the numbers during and at the end of each input session. I very much doubt that I would have had as much ease with this project if I had had to deal with the numbers as he did. When our initial and follow-up mailing produced an 88% response, I decided to call the remaining colleges to create a 100% result (I like the number.) Again, Stephen wouldn't call, but he would manage me in making the calls! He managed, I called, and we reached my goal of 100%. As stated above, respect your student's unwillingness to do specific steps. If s/he refuses, it's probably due to (1) lack of self-confidence; (2) discomfort with the step; and/or (3) not liking the particular job. Forcing a student to do hated work creates messes, not results. Finally, by respecting an individual student's limits, you will be delightfully surprised at what s/he can and will do.

•Plan to spend a portion of your "saved" time training your work study students as well as reviewing their work and correcting mistakes. If you have more than one student available, they can function as "coaches" for the work each is doing. This is done by appointing each student as a manager of a different project or a different portion of a project. Don't be

political with the management appointments. Your better students will automatically manage any project whether or not they are the "appointed" manager. Either way, by having work study students as collaborators, you cannot expect the "saved" time to equal the amount of hours they work. You also cannot expect them to self-manage.

•The more specific the deadline, the more you need to manage the students and, if necessary, do the work yourself. If you have a specific deadline for any project - research or otherwise - give the students enough time to do the project along with some lead time for you to finish the project or research step if necessary.

•Make certain you have the word of your supervisors or anyone who can interfere with your work study students that you will have free access to supervise them (unmolested!) before you plan your project. This includes going above your current supervisor if there's a possibility your immediate supervisor will be changed. I've managed my own work study students at my college since my first year full time - when I was both Department Chair and Director of Public Relations at the college. I had had my own work study students for the three years I was department chair and the five subsequent years after I resigned the post with the blessings and noninterference of the department chairs until last year. Last year, a new person was hired as Department chair. He decided that he would supervise all departmental work study students, that I would not be allowed my own work study students, and that I

would need to make specific requests for help. The research project I am currently conducting has a pre-test and post-test for two self-reports (48 items) for five classes. Due to the new system, none of my data could be prepared to be input into SPSSx. I had to wait until the fall and have graduate assistants at Emerson, my alma mater, input the data - out of the kindness of the hearts of peers there. Not everyone is lucky enough to have their graduate school two towns over and with people willing to support the research of a graduate. It would be wise to insure that your supply of work study students will not be cut off before committing to do a project.

•Finally, do not expect any specific skills from your work study students before you meet them. Each student brings to the work study experience talents and deficiencies (sound like human beings). Generally, respecting what each is unwilling to do will keep your project from harm.

"The Thrill of Victory" (Benefits)

There are many excellent rewards for an instructor who uses work study students as research collaborators. Some may seem obvious once stated, but others aren't.

•Having work study students function as research collaborators allows you a perspective on your research none of your peers can offer to you. Students have a tendency to cut through the fog and get down to the essentials. If you're wise, you won't dismiss a work study student's questions as to purpose or methodology. Students have yet to develop the the

fear of looking unsophisticated and are usually willing to question.

•As briefly mentioned before, your work study student will probably be a willing co-creator of your research project, if you are willing to respect his or her ideas for methods or fresh nuances. This requires your willingness to let go of some of the "control" in our projects we all strive to create out of the chaos. Students in my Public Relations class taught me that the best place to hang posters for an educational campaign is in the bathroom stalls. They claim it's due to the "captive audience" effect. All I know is that as someone who never lived in a dormitory in my life, I would never have thought of it. It was not only outside of my reality, but it was also extremely successful.

•Having majors in your field as work study students provides your students with an applied understanding of course work not available in most classes. The UNICEF special event that I run every year at the college is, for the most part, a special event which is a fundraising and educational campaign. Work study students who work on this as a research project tend to grasp many PR management concepts that they might have otherwise missed.

•Having female majors as work study students allows you the possibility of mentoring a woman in your own field. This has been, for me as a woman, one of the privileges and challenges of using work study students as research collaborators. I did not have the opportunity to be mentored by a female mentor in my own graduate education and in my

career. Thus, mentoring a fellow female is a stretch for me - an experiment in the unknown. For my female students, it's usually either a delightful experience or an opportunity to work out their own conflict with their mother. Either way I find a lot of value in the relationship.

For male professors, mentoring female work study students in the major is probably less of a challenge - unless the student has some hardy issues with her father figure.

As a female professor, mentoring male work study students has also been a growth-inducing experience for me. All of my academic mentors were male - however, I am not a male - and some of the methods used by a male mentoring a female do not seem to work for a female mentor mentoring a male. For the most part, I have been blessed with the male work study students I have had the opportunity to mentor. They have taught me to mentor male students (and peers) graciously.

•Finally, using work study students as research collaborators can make some fairly cut and dry work into a great deal of fun. Students have a tendency to be enthusiastic about what they are doing - especially if they are discovering new terrain. When the student is allowed to provide input - whether or not the input is actually implemented - the research project become a great adventure. This sense of adventure can rub off on the researcher and the research project can become a joyful detective game - what I vaguely remember as my original purpose in beginning the research - to answer questions (or as the literature states it, disprove the null hypothesis).

Conclusion

Being the only person in Communication Studies at my college doesn't seem to induce much peer collaborative research, which is something I'd like to do. However, the option of student collaborative research for a "lonely only" at a small college is a multi-faceted experience. Whether you are a "lonely only" at a small college or a member of a large department in a University, student collaborator research offers both challenges and pitfalls.